Notes on Humanity and Humanism
Version 1.4.1

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Contents

i About these notes

These notes begin as a kind of follow up to *Notes on Modern Philosophy*[2] which I began to keep track of my DACE[1] course last term. This term I have begun another ten-session DACE course, on Humanity and Humanism, led by Paul Harkin. At present I do not intend that these notes will be as long as the last document, but we shall see.

Once again my purpose in writing these notes is to help me understand better my DACE work (on Humanism this time). I hope that I may clarify my thoughts on this as I set out my present understanding, and that constructive criticism of them by others could lead me to better understanding.

Throughout these notes numerals in square brackets [1] refer to references in the end-notes list in the References chapter, readers of the Microsoft Word version of this document may hyperlink to them by *Ctrl left-click* and return via the *Back* button in the *Web* toolbar. Many references include further hyperlinks to resources openly available via the *Internet* and the *World Wide Web*. Frequently I prefer to cut and paste quoted passages rather than paraphrase them, for fear of distorting the intended meaning. These passages are referenced of course and rendered in an *italic* font.

This document remains a 'work in progress' until this disclaimer is removed.

ii About me

I declare an interest in the scientific method; reason; evidence-based conclusions; – and that I call myself an atheist (based on my definition of God, of which more later maybe?). I studied Physics (and Medical Physics) at university and have worked in teaching (very briefly) and as a computer software engineer on various scientific/engineering applications.

iii Notes on Humanity and Humanism

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[1] Department of Adult and Continued Education

1　Introduction

1.1　Dramatis Personae

Paul Harkin started with an introductions game to introduce ourselves, these are the ones I remember just now:

Paul Harkin	Came to H via Philosophy where most interested in ethics, politics, mind. Met H celebrant at a wedding → therapist after Carl Rodgers in the H tradition.
Sheila	interested in H via Carl Rodgers, not religious
Wilma	Retired social worker, husband is a celebrant.
Brian	Ex school teacher interested in philosophy and arts
Alex	Retired computer engineer, interested in moral philosophy, did DACE philosophy course some time ago.
Michael	Interested in all aspects
Tom	Worked in finance, now retired. Interested in music and expanding knowledge.
Ann	Science teacher, Presbyterian
Jennifer	Wants to learn about the positive aspects of H
Muriel	
Margaret	
Sandra	Member of the H Soc. – agnostic
Bill	From a 'faith' family
John	That's me
Pauline	Retired (Oban) librarian moved to Glasgow 18 months ago for a bit more culture. Anglican upbringing but disappointed by their attitude to women, now agnostic or atheist. Keen to keep her mind in gear, currently on 3 DACE courses, no philosophy so far.
Monica	A 'cradle Catholic'

1.2　Curriculum

Paul sketched out a 10 week curriculum:

1. Varieties of Humanism. Terminology
2. Reasoning about God; arguments for.
3. Reasoning about God; arguments against.
4. Morality with and without God. The *Euthyphro* problem and relativism.
5. Empiricism, naturalism and morality
6. Materialsm and Humanity
7. Disenchantment and the sacred
8. Humanism, tolerance and the state
9. Education
10. Meaning/Review

and a suggested reading list:

Richard Norman, *On Humanism*

Dolan Cummings (ed), *Debating Humanism*
Ben Rogers (ed), *Is Nothing Sacred?*
Richard Holloway, *Godless Morality*
A.C. Grayling, *What is Good?*
Robin lePoidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*
J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*
Christopher Hitchens (ed), *The Portable Atheist*

1.3   Glossary of terms

We discussed (briefly) what **we** should mean by the following words:

Theism	A key issue (for me at least) was agreeing what we meant by God with respect to defining these terms. At first we agreed that we should use God to mean *supreme*, *supernatural* being, but <u>not necessarily</u> *omnipotent*, *omniscient*, *caring for humanity* etc.
Atheism	I suggested that while we might say a theist *believes* in God, I felt that as an atheist my denial of God is based more on *reasoned argument* than *belief*. This led to a brief discussion of *belief* being evidence-based **or** a matter of faith. Both are possible, and a theist my have faith **and** accept some kind of evidence which supports it.
Agnosticism	
Humanism	Humans can construct their own moral code. There is an 'innate' goodness in Humans…
Naturalism	Evolution cf creationism ? Humans cf beasts?
Dualism	Descartes style mind-body dualism, or physicalist monism?
Moral Relativism	Different cultures may have different moral codes, respect them all?
Multiculturalism	Law must respect sub-cultures in society
Liberalism	Tolerant, open-minded, concerned for freedom (see J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*) – state facilitates human freedom, state's ability to limit freedom should be constrained.
Secularism	Life beyond religion…

1.4   What is Humanism ?

Paul offered three paragraphs, on each from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man* 1486; Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian, 1927* and Richard Norman, *On Humanism, 2005*.

And *Some Questions* to ponder over the coming weeks (I have numbered them in case I want to refer to them later) :

1. Does Humanism involve a rejection of religious belief ?
2. How do atheism and Humanism differ?
3. Is a rejection of religious belief rational?
4. What value to Humanists place on reason?
5. Does science undermine religion?
6. Should we be atheists or agnostics?
7. Is Humanism an intolerant position?
8. Isn't Humanism itself as much a 'creed' as any religious doctrine?
9. What value do Humanists find in life?
10. Can we make sense of morality without God?
11. Does Humanism entail moral relativism?
12. Can we make sense of morality as the word of God
13. What is the importance of the 'human' in Humanism?
14. What values do Humanists typically stress, and why?
15. Does Humanism entail a barren, 'spiritually' empty picture of the world?
16. What view do Humanists take concerning the role of the state?
17. What view of education to Humanists favour?
18. Do Humanists respect the rights of individuals?
19. Is there any room for ideas of the 'sacred' from a Humanist standpoint?

1.5   *Arguing about God*

Paul Harkin posed some famous questions to prepare us for reasoning about God:

1. *It is wrong, always, everywhere and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.*
   WK Clifford (1845-79)

   There was general agreement that this is true notwithstanding the usual discussion of semantics, what is meant here by *believe*, *insufficient* etc. Leading to a short debate on *belief* v *knowing* – I don't just *believe* that is true, I *know* that is true. Paul explained that the generally accepted view is that *knowledge* is *justified* true *belief*. That reminded me of Plato's tripartite theory of knowledge[19]:
   A person S knows proposition P if and only if:
   * P is true
   * S believes P
   * S is justified in believing P.

2. *The demand that religious belief be based rationally on evidence and argument is too strong. Many of our beliefs are basic and unsupported, such as the belief that you are now reading this sentence. So why not a belief in god?*
   Alvin Plantinga

   Our problem here was with the assertion that *the belief that you are now*

reading this sentence could be as unsupported as a theist's belief in God, there seems ample reason to believe we are reading the sentence. I think that Platinga may be saying that it could be useful to stipulate that God exists, without attempting to prove it.

3. *Atheism is just as much a matter of faith as theism. One cannot prove conclusively the existence of God, but equally, one cannot prove conclusively that god does not exist. Therefore both positions involve a leap of faith.*
   similar to Stephen Law at *A bad argument* in *Sleight-of-hand with "Faith"* [13]

   We generally agreed that it is difficult to disprove the existence of God but felt the burden of proof should be on the theist to prove that God does exist. Until then the Occcam's razor principle [15] leads us to find that God does not exist – if naturalistic explanations are available why adopt the supernatural?

4. *Since nothing is the cause of its own existence, and the universe exists, it follows that something must be responsible for it. The Universe must have had an original cause – a creator – and that cause is God.*
   like *The Kalam argument* [7], as set out by two Muslim philosophers al-Kindi (9th century) and al-Ghazali (1058-1111) .

   What came before the Big Bang? etc is an intriguing class of questions and clearly difficult to answer. To quote myself from *Notes on Modern Philosophy* [2]:

   I have considered the cosmological argument before (who hasn't?), usually in its 'What came before the Big Bang ?' form, and concluded that we may as well accept some kind of causa sui or 'First Cause', or remain stuck in Descartes' infinite regress. We might term that thing God for want of a name but I can never manage the leap of faith that leads people to believe God is somehow omniscient; omnipotent; loving human-kind etc – where is the evidence for that?[18]. To me God, used in the causa sui sense, is just an abstract concept we can assign for now to the philosophical parking-lot, while we move on to areas which seem more usefully productive.

   I (rather flippantly) suggested a way out of the *infinite regress* by joining the end of the universe back to it's beginning, saying the cause of the *Big Bang* at the beginning of the universe was the *Big Crunch* at its end. The obvious problem with his is the implication that the universe could end before it began, but it was pointed out that time itself is held to begin and end with the life of the universe, so maybe this apparent paradox is tolerable!

5. *When we observe nature and the intricate manner in which everything in it functions to sustain life, it is implausible to suppose that such a design came about by chance. Imagine finding a watch and observing the*

intricate workings of its moving parts; we would certainly conclude that the watch was designed for some purpose and therefore, that it also must have a designer. That designer is God
like William *Paley's Teleological Argument* [10].

Paul Harkin tabled part of Stephen Law's chapter on Does God Exist? in *The Philosophy Gym.* We considered *The Levers of the Universe*, a variant of *The Design Argument* which concedes that the world may be governed by natural laws, but insists that those laws were designed by God. Thus, it is no accident that the Earth and the solar system and gravity are just right for us, God has arranged it just so. Most people seemed sceptical about this. I suggested that if *The Levers of the Universe* had been set differently then the Earth, and ourselves may never have existed – but a different DACE class of aliens (from our point of view) may be having the same discussion on a very different planet where the natural conditions were conducive to their own development. So we might regard our brief performance in this part of space and time as simply accidental, to think otherwise is to fall for *The Lottery Fallacy* (that there is more than chance behind unlikely wins).

2 Reasoning about God; Arguments for

2.1 *St.Thomas Aquinas*

St.Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) famously proposed five arguments for the existence of God, as explained by Jon Phelan [3].

In the Summa theologiae Aquinas records his famous five ways which seek to prove the existence of God from the facts of change, causation, contingency, variation and purpose. These cosmological and teleological arguments can be neatly expressed in syllogistic form as below:

Way 1
1. The world is in motion (motus).
2. All changes in the world are due to some prior cause.
3. There must be a prior cause for this entire sequence of changes, i.e. God.

Way 2
1. The world is a sequence of events.
2. Every event in the world has a cause.
3. There must be a cause for the entire sequence of events, i.e. God.

Way 3
1. The world might not have been.
2. Everything that exists in the world depends on some other thing for its existence.
3. The world itself must depend upon some other thing for its existence, i.e. God.

Way 4
1. There are degrees of perfection in the world.
2. Things are more perfect the closer they approach the maximum.
3. There is a maximum perfection, i.e. God.

Way 5
1. Each body has a natural tendency towards its goal.
2. All order requires a designer.
3. This end-directedness of natural bodies must have a designing force behind it. Therefore each natural body has a designer i.e. God.

Aquinas devotes a further part of his philosophical writing to the problem of religious language. He accepts that God-talk may be literal or metaphorical but believes that in its literalness it is never univocal or equivocal but analogical. That is to say a phrase such as 'God is omnipotent, omniscient and compassionate' represents a relation between what we mean by these terms and the divine nature. God's nature corresponds and is in ratio to the significance behind these terms, yet still literal in that it reveals to us something about God.

In more modern times three main categories of arguments for God's existence are still offered. These are *The Ontological Argument*; *The Cosmological Argument*; and *The Design Argument*. Given the time available for our DACE course we will neglect the *The Ontological Argument*, which is now rather out of favour (but see [4]). The other two are discussed briefly in the next sections.

2.2 The Design Argument

The fifth of Aquinas's *Five Ways* (in the 13th century) leads to William *Paley's Teleological Argument* (~1800) and to what endures today as *The Design Argument [10,11,12].*

The Design Argument is summarised very well by Nigel Warburton in [*11*], I will paraphrase it and quote some short passages:

As we look around us at the natural world we can't help noticing how everything in it is suited to the function it performs: everything bears evidence of having been designed. This is supposed to demonstrate the existence of a Creator. If, for example, we examine the human eye, we see how its minute parts all fit together, each part cleverly suited to what it is apparently made for: seeing.

Paley drew the analogy of a watch found on the heath, its intricate mechanism clearly constructed by a skilled craftsperson for the sole purpose of timekeeping. *Supporters of the Design Argument... argue we can tell by looking at the eye that it was designed by some sort of Divine Watchmaker. It is as if God has left a trademark on all objects he or she has made.*

This sort of argument, based on the similarity of two things is, is known as an argument from analogy. Arguments from analogy rely on the principle that if two things are similar in some respects they will very likely be similar in others.

Those who accept the Design argument tell us that everywhere we look, particularly in the natural world, we can find further confirmation of God's existence. Because these things are far more ingeniously constructed than a watch the Divine Watchmaker must have been correspondingly more intelligent than the human watchmaker. Indeed, Divine Watchmaker must have been so powerful, and so clever that it makes sense to assume that it was God as traditionally understood by theists.

Warburton then discusses some criticisms of the Design Argument, which I will list:

- *Weakness of analogy* – arguments from analogy are best made when the objects compared are very similar. There is only a vague similarity between natural objects and complex person-made objects, so *any conclusions based on the analogy will as a result be correspondingly vague.*

- *Evolution* – Darwin's theory of evolution from *The Origin of the Species* (1859) provides a widely accepted alternative explanation. The process of natural selection over 600,000 years could lead to our development from primitive, single-cell life forms. Each random mutation leading to advantages, or disadvantages for the next generation, and the survival of the fittest.

- *Limitations on conclusion* – even without the first two objections the Design Argument's conclusion is unconvincing in several ways:
    - it does not imply monotheism, the world could have been designed by a committee
    - if the Designer were all-powerful there would be no design-flaws, like myopia.
    - as we look around the natural world it is very hard to accept that everything is the result of a benevolent Creator (cruelty, disease, natural disasters…) *An all-knowing God would know that evil exists; an all-powerful God would be able to prevent it from occurring; and an all-good God would not want it to exist.*
    - notwithstanding the other limitations, it does not seem reasonable to conclude that the Designer still exists.

A variant of the *Design Argument*, which seeks to avoid some of these criticisms, is the *Fine Tuning Argument* (also referred to as *The Levers of the Universe* – see item 5 in Arguing about God). Warburton describes this as the *Anthropic Principle*:

This is the view that the chance of the world turning out to be conducive human survival and development was so tiny that we can conclude that the world is the work of a divine architect. On this view, the fact that human beings have evolved and survived provides us with proof of God's existence. God must have controlled the physical conditions in our universe, and fine-tuned them to allow just this kind of life form to evolve. This view is bolstered by scientific research indicating the limited range of suitable starting conditions for a universe in which life could develop at all.

Warburton also raises the *lottery objection* to this, as discussed already. *The mistake that defenders of the Fine Tuning argument make is to assume that when something happens which is unlikely, there must be a more plausible explanation than that it arose naturally... Furthermore the Fine Tuning argument is also vulnerable to the range of criticisms of the Design Argument outlined above.*

2.3   The Cosmological Argument

The *Cosmological* [5], or *First Cause* [6], argument for God concludes that God exists from the intriguing question *Where did the universe come from?* This can be reached from almost any starting point by asking *Where did x come from?* and iterating back, asking again and again *Where did … come from?* To put an end to this infinite regress we must reach a cause which is not

itself caused by something else: the first and uncaused (or self-caused) cause of everything and, according to the Cosmological argument, this is God.

In [5]. Ben Dupré points out that *the cosmological argument has its routes in antiquity, and it is the basis for the first three of Aquinas's Quinque Viae (or Five Ways).* In [6] Nigel Warburton sets out the criticisms of the First Cause Argument:

- *Self-contradictory – The First Cause Argument begins with the assumption that every single thing was caused by something else, but then proceeds to contradict this by saying that God was the very first cause, and that there is one uncaused cause: God. It invites the question 'And what caused God?' Someone convinced by the First Cause Argument might object that they did not mean that everything had a cause, only that everything except God had a cause. But this is no better. If the series of effects and causes is going to stop somewhere, why must it stop at God? Why couldn't it stop earlier in the regression, with the appearance of the universe itself.*

  We discussed this in the DACE class and Paul explained that some Theists choose their words carefully, saying that only things *which are created* must have cause, and that does not include God because It has always existed. This seems similar to the so-called *Modal Cosmological Argument* [8,9] which takes as its premise a *contingent* universe, one which might not have existed this way, and proposes God as its non-contingent cause. At [8] Tim Holt explains: *The universe, the argument suggests, is contingent, i.e. it might not have existed. There must therefore be some reason why it does. The only plausible explanation of the universe's existence, the argument concludes, is that there exists a being outside the universe, who created it.*

- *Not a proof – The first Cause Argument assumes that effects and causes could not possibly go back for ever in what is termed an infinite regress: a never ending series going back in time It assumes that there was a first cause that gave rise to all other things. But must this really have been so?... If it is possible to have an infinite series at all then why shouldn't the effects and causes extend backwards into the past to infinity?*

- *Limitations on conclusion – Even if these two criticisms can be met, it does not prove that the first cause is the God described by the Theists. As with the Design argument, there are serious limitations on what can be concluded from the First Cause argument:*

  o Any first cause of the whole universe as we now know it was clearly very powerful, so we might claim it to be an all-powerful God. But the argument presents no evidence for supposing the first cause is either all-knowing or all-good.

  o *as with the Design Argument, a defender of the First Cause Argument would still be left with the problem of how an all-*

powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God could tolerate the
amount of evil that there is in the world.

3 Reasoning about God; Arguments against

Although we had inevitably discussed some arguments against God when considering objections to the arguments for God, we intended to devote some time to discussing what is probably the principal argument against, *The Problem of Evil*. As preparation for that we began by considering some aspects of *Freedom and Reason* and that led on to *Free Will and Determinism*, which is a huge and very important subject.

I will deal, fairly briefly, with the *Problem of Evil* first, then return to grapple with *Free Will and Determinism*, which at present I find more interesting (and difficult).

3.1 *The Problem of Evil*

Although we were not 'formally' discussing *The problem of Evil* this first came up when Bill was talking about an interview he had heard with David Attenborough [16]. Interviewed by Jeremy Paxman, Attenborough said he had a standard reply for viewers who ask why he shows pictures of hummingbirds and other beautiful creatures without mentioning God. Attenborough added that he queries why people always cite hummingbirds, butterflies or roses when they ask the question. His reply showed his difficulty in believing that a God who made *all things bright and beautiful* also made *them all,* including river blindness (onchocerciasis):

> *I tend to think of an innocent little child sitting on the bank of a river in Africa, who's got a worm boring through his eye that can render him blind.*

> *Now, presumably you think this Lord created this worm, just as he created the hummingbird. I find that rather tricky.*

The gist of this argument is not hard to grasp, if the world is presided over by God who is omnipotent and omniscient and good, why is there so much suffering in it? I will quote Nigel Warburton [18] to elaborate:

There is evil in the world: this cannot seriously be denied. Think only of the Holocaust, of Pol Pot's massacres in Cambodia, or of the widespread practice of torture. These are all examples of moral evil or cruelty: human beings inflicting suffering on other human beings for whatever reason. Cruelty is also often inflicted on animals. There is also a different kind of evil, known as natural or metaphysical evil: earthquakes, disease, and famine are examples of this sort of evil.

Natural evil has natural causes, though it may be worsened by human incompetence or lack of care, 'Evil' may not be the most appropriate word to describe such natural phenomena, which give rise to human suffering, because the word is usually used to refer to deliberate cruelty. However, whether we label them 'natural evil' or choose another name for them, the existence of

such things as disease and natural disaster has to be accounted for if we are to maintain a belief in a benevolent God.

In view of the existence of so much evil, how can anyone seriously believe in the existence of an all-good God? An all-knowing God would know that evil exists; an all-powerful God would be able to prevent it occurring; and an all-good God would not want it to exist. But evil continues to occur. This is the Problem of Evil: the problem of explaining how the allege attributes of God can be compatible with the undeniable fact of evil. This is the most serious challenge to belief in the Theist's God.

Warburton goes on to discuss several attempted solutions to the *Problem of Evil,* I will just list them with very short summaries:

- saintliness: God permits evil to provide opportunities for shining examples of great moral goodness. Imagine Mother Teresa without suffering!

- artistic analogy: God permits evil because it provides counterpoints to good in overall beauty of his masterpiece, just as a few discordant notes may contribute to the overall harmony of a piece of music!

- the free will defence: This is the most important 'solution' – that God has given human beings free will and has since left them to make their own choices. Some theists argue that it is better that God allows us to have free will (even if some will do evil things) than if He removes evil by preventing people from acting in evil ways (and removes our free will, leaving us as robotic but well behaved automatons). I am unsure how theist's explain why God permits river blindness to affect innocent children, unless He determines that the worm which causes onchocerciasis should be free to do that if it chooses.

We briefly discussed a further possible solution, which relies on the possibility that there is some kind of spiritual afterlife. In that case, Theists might argue, the Problem of Evil in the present life could be almost trivial compared with the much more significant portion of our existence, which will be in a life after death where the purpose of all God's mysterious ways is revealed.

3.2   *Free Will and Determinism*

In preparation for this Paul Harkin asked us to consider the following scenario:

I am deliberating about whether or not to complete my tax return honestly, and I am weighing up the "fors" and "againsts". On the "for" side, I reflect that if I am dishonest and am caught, the penalty could be severe. I am also aware that it would be morally wrong to lie, while everyone else is paying their fair share – equivalent to "freeloading". On the "against" side, I know lots of people regularly evade their tax payments, so why should I naively stick to the rules? The demand that I should isn't fair. I also reflect that a reduced payment might allow me to take my children on that skiing holiday they have been clamouring for. After some time weighing things up, I decide I will, after all, make an honest declaration.

We debated the following statements, trying to decide whether we agreed or disagreed with them:

1. *Whatever I chose to do in these circumstances, my decision was determined by my reasons and my character.*

2. *While deliberating, both possibilities remain genuinely open to me; I could be either honest or dishonest.*

3. *Although my past experience has shaped my character and dispositions, these do not determine my behaviour, and I do, on many occasions, successfully override these dispositions.*

4. *Since I am a material being, like all other material beings, my behaviour must be determined. Hence this choice too was determined.*

5. *If my choice was determined, then I cannot be said to have chosen freely.*

6. *If my choice is determined, that is no impediment to my possessing free choice or free will.*

A key word in all this is obviously *determined* and we agreed that it is meant in the sense that there is a causal relationship between on event and another, the later event was caused by the earlier one.

Paul introduce the term *Psychological Determinism* which, I think, is the notion that all our actions are determined by a set of pertinent *reasons* and a set of *dispositions* which characterise our behaviour as we deliberate on what action to take. This seems to be a more humanised version of the standard, more physicalist definition of determinism, as explained by Richard Holton [20]:

…we have a picture of the world that is given to us by science according to which we are part of the natural world. But the natural world is governed deterministic causal laws. So everything we do, along with everything else, is deterministically caused by what went before. This is the thesis of determinism.

P1 If determinism is true, then every human action is causally necessitated

P2 If every action is causally necessitated, no one could have acted otherwise

P3 One only has free will if one could have acted otherwise

P4 Determinism is true

C No one has free will

This argument is clearly valid. So disagreements will focus on whether or not it is sound; and if it is, on which premise(s) it should be rejected. … Hard determinists accept soundness of the argument and so embrace its conclusion. Libertarians deny its conclusion, and do so by denying P4. Compatibilists deny the conclusion and accept P4—they want to hold determinism and free will are compatible—and so standardly want to reject one of the other premises; typically P2 or P3 (or both). But some positions that look like compatibilism turn out, on closer examination, to be arguing for the compatibility of determinism with our normal practices of holding people

responsible. So such positions seem to be able to accept the soundness of this argument.

All this made my brain hurt and I experienced a feeling of déja-vu from last term's Modern Philosophy course. Once again, I will quote myself from [2]:

We also discussed the problem of Free Will and Determinism, if the world is deterministic (a strict causal product of its previous state) how can people truly have Free Will? Some philosophers (incompatibilists) argue that Determinism and Free Will cannot co-exist, while others argue against incompatibilism. Hume differentiated between free and unfree actions: free actions are a result of choosing to act to achieve a desired result, acting in some coerced way is unfree. I am unclear why it seems axiomatic that the world should be deterministic, but apparently that way lies madness. Certainly physical science has come to terms with events which cannot be predicted (eg the way in which a nucleus might disintegrate) and many processes are non-deterministic[2] (eg the weather) but that does not rule them out as subjects for scientific enquiry (both empirical and theoretical). An interesting notion is that we can never follow the path which we did not choose (eg Ian only lives in one of the 5 houses he considered, and John did attend the last DACE class). Did we really have Free Will at all?

Although I think of myself as normally disposed to reason and the 'scientific method', I still have difficulty accepting the soundness of the argument for determinism. Similarly I am still somewhat disposed to dualism, which apparently is increasingly deprecated in modern times.

In [21] Harry Frankfurt discusses coercion and moral responsibility, using a thought-experiment which involves a character named Black getting his victim, Jones, to do what Black wants him to do. Just how Black achieves this coercion is immaterial, he might threaten Jones, or hypnotise him, or give him a potion…:

Or let Black manipulate the minute processes of Jones's brain and nervous system in some more direct way, so that causal forces running in and out of his synapses and along the poor man's nerves determine that he chooses to act and that he does act in one way and not in any other.

Notwithstanding the rest of Frankfurt's essay, this seems to me to be a chilling description of what determinism means, if it is true. It seems there is no way for us to originate our very thoughts; they are simply determined by the causal chain of events stretching all the way from the Big Bang to our present dilemma. If that is what determinism implies then I'm with the Libertarians, determinism in this very strict, physical sense cannot be true. Or maybe I could live with determinism if I associate my mind and thoughts with a different substance? – but that would be dallying with dualism again.

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[2] This demonstrates a confusion between the terms *determined,* meaning *causally necessitated,* (ie caused by something) and *non-deterministic*, meaning *unpredictable.* A *non-deterministic* event was still caused by something, so the event was both *determined* and *non-deterministic.* However repeating the same causal event may produce a different effect, in that sense the process is *non-deterministic.*

3.3 *How to accept determinism; go with the flow; and be free*

Over the past few days I have changed my viewpoint, helped by a good family discussion, some reading, and some reflection. I have now forsaken the Libertarians and joined the ranks of the compatibilists, adopting some kind of monism over dualism on the way.

My son showed the way. For him determinism is a no-brainer, obviously everything must be caused by something and the causal chain must stretch back to the beginning of the universe. But he couldn't understand why I was so hung up on *my* mind, and upset that all my 'choices', actions and very thoughts could be determined by the universal chain of causal necessity. I objected that it seemed as if we couldn't originate anything if all our mental and physical activity was determined in some way.

Finally the penny began to drop and I think we reached a view we could both accept. Let's agree that determinism true, in all its variants, physical, psychological etc, because they all amount to the same thing really. And let's accept that there is only one, physical or material, substance. Then our mind, and our thoughts are just a different views on our brain, and the mental processes and memories which it hosts. They are mental and physical aspects of the same thing. I think this is what is meant by mind-brain identity, as proposed by Donald Davidson [22].

My previous difficulty was in reconciling determinism with the notion of *myself* as a unique individual person with my own personality and capable of original thought. What I have finally grasped, I think, is that although all events are part of the universal causal chain, some of those events occur within *me.* My personal identity is the sum total of my physical and mental state, including memories and experience acquired throughout my lifetime and saved somehow in my memory. So my thoughts are mental events determined in my mind by causal events, such as perception of external things; previous thoughts; stored memories and experience etc. I now think there is no need to say that mental process are anomalous, somehow exceptions to the rule of causal necessity. Thoughts which come into existence in *my* mind *are* my original thoughts, notwithstanding the fact that each of them was causally determined by a prior state of the universe. I still have difficulty with the notion that some people express, that every choice or action is *pre*-determined, as if every result could have been predicted. I have come round to the idea that determinism is true, and everything is determined by prior reasons and dispositions, perceptions etc, but I have in mind a kind of *just-in-time* determinism where the choice isn't made until it's chosen. And many of the determinants that contribute to the determination of that choice are previous thoughts, reasons, and dispositions of my own. To that extent the result was chosen by me, and I have free will.

I have covered some of this ground before in the DACE Modern Philosophy course, and my notes [2] include sections on the Mind-Body Problem, Personhood and Freedom. Then, I rather favoured dualism over monism (and physicalism), partly because I like the notion of the human spirit – even though I don't require it to survive bodily death. Now I am coming round to

compatibilism, and could accept that although my choices are psychologically determined (by my dispositions, reasons etc) they amount to my free will. Maybe I can re-invent my 'human spirit' notion as a characteristic set of dispositions typically caused to exist in human minds?

Donald Davidson's essay was helpful too, he starts

from the assumption that both the causal dependence, and the anomalousness, of mental events are undeniable facts.

but sympathises with a great quotation from Kant (*Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 75–6.):

it is as impossible for the subtlest philosophy as for the commonest reasoning to argue freedom away. Philosophy must therefore assume that no true contradiction will be found between freedom and natural necessity in the same human actions, for it cannot give up the idea of nature any more than that of freedom. Hence even if we should never be able to conceive how freedom is possible, at least this apparent contradiction must be convincingly eradicated. For if the thought of freedom contradicts itself or nature . . . it would have to be surrendered in competition with natural necessity.

Davidson then proposes three principles which seem inconsistent but require to be reconciled:

- *at least some mental events interact causally with physical events. (We could call this the Principle of Causal Interaction.)*
- *where there is causality, there must be a law: events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws. (We may term this the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality.)*
- *there are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained (the Anomalism of the Mental).*

…
It seems to me, however, that all three principles are true, so that what must be done is to explain away the appearance of contradiction; essentially the Kantian line.

I don't pretend to have followed exactly how Davidson achieves this explaining away of apparent contradiction. For now, I am quite prepared to accept that the third principle is not proven, that mental events *are* somehow subject to deterministic laws. It seems to me that the trick which is required is to explain how mental events are subject to deterministic laws, but nevertheless amount to individual freedom.

That's all for now, it's time for bed. I haven't said much about how we might sometimes be *unfree,* or somehow coerced into making choices at odds with our normal dispositions, but that doesn't seem to be a big problem any more. Those choices are determined too of course but maybe at a time when the 'balance of our mind' is disturbed somehow, possibly by the thought of that gun at our head, or the fact that we are in love, or angry, or drunk…

4 Morality with and without God

4.1 Moral right and wrong

We began by considering the following propositions:

A   Moral right and wrong derive from the word of God

B   We cannot provide a secular foundation for morality

C   Moral right and wrong are relative – not objective

Bill and I were tempted to dismiss A on the grounds that we have accepted the arguments that God does not exist. But we agreed that there is a great deal of theist morality we would have no problem with. Is it too optimistic to aspire to some sort of universal core or 'generic' morality that most people could accept, theists and atheists?

We would seek to reject B, Bill is not immoral because he's an atheist, and Monica, a 'cradle Catholic' agrees. To reject the existence of God does not imply rejecting morality, or saying there is no such thing as right and wrong. But how to provide a secular framework for morality?

Considering C, it seems that what might be right in some cultures is wrong in others, which implies that moral right and wrong are relative. But equally, it seems that some extreme behaviour (torture, infanticide etc) must be absolutely wrong. We recalled the outrage over alleged child abuse in the Pitcairn Islands [29].

The case divided the tiny population of locals and became a battleground between a 200 year-old island way of life on one side and modern British justice on the other...
In support of their menfolk, many of the women of the Island maintained that underage sex was part of Pitcairn's culture. Meralda Warren sister of the acquitted man acknowledges that most of the women of her generation were having sex at the ages of 12, 13 or 14. 'We're Polynesians,' she explains. 'In Polynesia we grow up very quickly'.

Pauline suggested that there might be a few 'core' moral principles that could be agreed universally, and that there could be a form of 'local rules' to suit the various sub-cultures. No doubt we will discuss the Archbishop of Canterbury's latest proposal [30] next week – *Williams argues official status for Islamic law could aid social cohesion* .

Paul explained an argument which is frequently made for moral relativism:

P1 Moral Values have changed over time and continue to vary from culture to culture
C1 Moral Values are relative

This argument is invalid because the premise does not sustain the conclusion as in:
P1 People disagree about who shot JFK
C1 There is no truth in the matter concerning who shot JFK

4.2 The Euthyphro dilemma

The *Euthyphro dilemma* was first expressed by Plato as part of Socrates' dialogue with Euthyphro. Then, it was couched in terms of what the Greek Gods deemed pious, but it has since been re-used in several variants as a dilemma for monotheists about the nature of moral right and wrong. Wikipedia [32] explains it quite well:

Is what is moral commanded by God because it is moral, or is it moral because it is commanded by God? The first horn of the dilemma (i.e. that which is moral is commanded by God because it is moral) implies that morality is independent of God and, indeed, that God is bound by morality just as his creatures are. God then becomes little more than a passer-on of moral knowledge.

The second horn of the dilemma (i.e. that which is moral is moral because it is commanded by God, known as divine command theory) runs into three main problems which I will paraphrase:

- *it implies that what is good is arbitrary, based merely upon God's whim; if God had created the world to include the values that rape, murder, and torture were virtues, while mercy and charity were vices, then they would have been.*

- *it implies that calling God good makes no non-tautological sense* – if goodness is what God deems it to be then we should not argue that God is good because of what He deems.

- *it involves a 'naturalistic fallacy' (from ,G. E. Moore in his 1903 book Principia Ethica)*. I think Moore meant that it is invalid to claim something is right just because God commands it – but I expect theists would disagree.

4.3 Moral relativism versus Moral realism

According to Peter Singer [33] in his introduction to Michael Smith's article:

Moral realism is the view that in some sense there is an objective moral reality; realism thus asserts that morality is objective. It also seems undeniable, however, that morality provides us with reasons for action. But the standard picture of human psychology suggests that to have a reason for action we must have a desire; and desires seem to be subjective, in that one person's desire may not resemble the desires of another. That difficulty for realism is the theme of this article.

We have discussed moral relativism already but found that the argument for it, based on the premise that moral values change, is not entirely convincing.

Moral realism, or moral objectivism, remains an attractive proposition then. But if real moral values exist, independent of any God, how do we discover what they are? What things are absolutely right or wrong?

I read Michael Smith's article but was rather disappointed, still naïve I suppose after all these years. Eventually Smith explains *moral realism is simply the metaphysical (or ontological) view that there exist moral facts* … but goes on to concede that the moral realist's *problem is that, because he has no explanation of the practicality of moral judgement, he has no plausible story about what kind of fact a moral fact is. And if he has no plausible story about the kind of fact a moral fact is, then, despite initial appearance, he has no plausible story about what moral reflection and moral argument are all about.*

It turns out that *the realist has eschewed queer facts about the universe in favour of a more 'subjectivist' conception of moral facts.* Smith seems to propose that we should discover what is a moral fact by seeking a convergence of opinions reached by people after a period of *well-informed, cool, calm and collected* reflection. So finally, moral realism segues into subjectivism and even then:

it must be agreed on all sides that moral argument has not yet produced the sort of convergence in our desires that would make the idea of a moral fact – a fact about the reasons we have entirely determined by our circumstances – look plausible. But neither has moral argument had much of a history in times in which we have been able to engage in free reflection unhampered by a false biology (the Aristotelian tradition) or a false belief in God (the Judeo-Christian tradition). It remains to be seen whether sustained moral argument can elicit the requisite convergence in our moral beliefs, and corresponding desires, to make the idea of a moral fact look plausible. The kind of moral realism described here holds out the hope that it will. Only time will tell.

5   References

Many of which are WWW resources, all of which I have found useful in some way, none of which I have found entirely unhelpful. Some of the books, principally *Philosophy: The Basics* and *50 philosophy ideas* are popular 'introductions to philosophy' with bite-size articles and many references, but both these are very useful for all that.

Also, several of the references are also included in *Notes on Modern Philosophy*, because the two *Notes on... documents* overlap so much.

1. These notes, **Notes on Humanity and Humanism***,* may be downloaded from the sidebar menu at

2. **Notes on Modern Philosophy** may also be downloaded from the sidebar menu at http://www.dalriada.org.uk

3. **Thomas Aquinas** by Jon Phelan at http://philosophers.co.uk/cafe/phil_mar2001.htm

4. **The ontological argument** in *Philosophy: The Basics*, Nigel Warburton (Routledge, Fourth Edition, 2004) pp18-19

5. **The cosmological argument** in *50 philosophy ideas you really need to know,* Ben Dupré (Quercus) pp156-159

6. **The first cause argument** in *Philosophy: The Basics*, Nigel Warburton (Routledge, Fourth Edition, 2004) pp16-18

7. **The The Kalam Cosmological Argument** at http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/kalamcosmological.html

8. **Is the Universe Contingent?** http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/istheuniversecontingent.html

9. **Can We Be Sure God Exists?,** David Barrett and Stephen Dingley http://www.faith.org.uk/Ideas/Articles/GodArticles/CanWeBeSureGodExists.htm

10. **The Teleological Argument: William Paley** at http://www.scandalon.co.uk/philosophy/teleological.htm

11. **The design argument** in Philosophy: The Basics, Nigel Warburton (Routledge, Fourth Edition, 2004) pp12-16

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13. **Sleight-of-hand with "Faith"** by Stephen Law at http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/contentViewArticle.asp?article=1475

14. **Speculations on the Cosmological Argument** by Roy Jackson at
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19. **The tripartite theory of knowledge** in *50 philosophy ideas you really need to
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23. **Faith and reason** in *50 philosophy ideas you really need to know,* Ben Dupré
    (Quercus) pp173-175

24. **Mind** in *Philosophy: The Basics*, Nigel Warburton (Routledge, Fourth
    Edition, 2004) pp 127-147.

25. **The Shape of Time** in *The Universe in a Nutshell*, Stephen Hawking (Bantam
    Press, 2001) pp 29-66

26. **Leviathan** in *50 philosophy ideas you really need to know,* Ben Dupré
    (Quercus) pp 184-187.

27. **Politics** in *Philosophy: The Basics*, Nigel Warburton (Routledge, Fourth
    Edition, 2004) pp 67-91.

28. **A Question of Identity** by Bob Harris at
    http://www.philosophynow.org/issue62/62harrison.htm

29. Trouble in Paradise, the Pitcairn Story
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30. **Uproar as archbishop says sharia law inevitable in UK** at
   http://www.guardian.co.uk/frontpage/story/0,,2254591,00.html

31. **Keep the Faith**, Sholto Byrnes at
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